1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

would never be able to repay during his lifetime, and the debt would devolve on his sons. Another Maria from Irakdumme village had borrowed Rs. 20 bride-price from an Echli money-lender ten years before and had so far paid him paddy worth Rs. 22-8 as interest, but nothing towards principal, and had no idea what the final demand of his creditor would be. Another Maria from Batanfundi village had borrowed Rs. 12 from an Ahiri money-lender six or seven years ago and though he had repaid the principal was still being dunned for Rs. 40 worth of grain as interest, and was afraid that this high rate would now be doubled, as owing to the crop failure of 1939 he had been unable to repay any grain that year.

Throughout this area a crying need is an agency for advancing small seed-loans. The Government have seldom done this, on the theory that the zamindar should meet his tenants' needs; but we could not find one who had ever been given a seed-loan by the estate. The rates of interest extorted by the nests of money-lenders at Ahiri, Rajaram, Allapilli, Indaram, Echli and other centres are preposterous. The need for these seed-loans has been imposed on the Marias largely by the arbitrary stopping of their *podu* (*dahi*) shifting cultivation; *podu* fields always produced seed grain at least. Such is the pathetic honesty of the Marias that when the Debt Conciliation Board was working they readily acceded to the money-lenders' request to place their thumb-marks by the hundred on application after application begging the Board not to interfere between them and their money-lenders: it was only by persistent effort that the Board secured nearly 800 applications. In our camps the Maria elders opposed debt relief measures on the ground that if a man borrowed it was only right that he and his heirs after him should go on repaying. The final report of the Debt Conciliation Board of 1936 mentioned some fantastic cases. In one a Telugu Komti of Indaram had lent a Maria of Koreli a bullock on hire in 1920, at the usual fee of Rs. 4 worth of paddy. For twelve years the Maria went on paying Rs. 5 worth of paddy. In 1932 the Komti made out that the Maria still owed him Rs. 700 worth of paddy, and proceeded to show against him further compound interest of 50 per cent., until, when the Board took up the case, the Komti claimed as much as Rs. 2,320 worth of grain—all this for the hire of a single indifferent bullock. This, however, pales into insignificance against an Echli case of a money-lender lending Rs. 32 to finance a wedding a few years before, and in his accounts showing this debt, despite a repayment of Rs. 20, as having risen to Rs. 17,519!

At every halting place and camp the Marias' chief grievance, however, was not so much the exactions of money-lenders as the

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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241 economic disaster caused by the arbitrary stopping of their *dahi*, *podu* or *jalapod* cultivation. They said that they did not need this 735 for profit, but to save their lives. 'They urged that if *jalapod* were allowed in a reasonable manner they would always be able to produce enough corn even in years of deficient or irregular rainfall. The men said that in the former days of *jalapod* cultivation they usually cultivated a plot for two years and then left it for five or six years, within which short period *palas*[1] and other forest growth grew high enough for them to cut and burn again."[2]

Mirkal, Pirmeli and surrounding villages are within the orbit of 177 Allapilli and Ahiri, and the average Maria was clearly exposed to 291 Hindu culture contact, of which the outward sign was the wearing of coats and shorts purchased from Ahiri market or from itinerant Mahar pedlars.

The *District Gazetteer* records that the Maria house in the 342 remoter parts of the zamindaris is occasionally very substantial, with walls formed of barked logs laid horizontally and kept in position by upright posts, the interstices being daubed with mud and the whole being thatched with jungle grass.[3] There still are many substantial huts in the villages between Allapilli and Lahiri, but I formed the impression that the standard of housing had deteriorated, possibly because of stricter regulation of felling of trees for domestic purposes.

On the twenty-three miles drive from Pirmeli to Bhamragarh 273 we passed several villages rich in toddy palms, and often saw Marias 656 climbing the tree trunks by rough 'ladders' lashed to the trunks consisting of bamboo stems with the stumps of their side-shoots cut short to act as rungs. The climbers carry, slung round their [415] waist and hanging down like tails, thick bamboo tubes to catch the tapped juice, as described on page 168, sometimes also they take up big gourd bottles. The Provincial Government has for a long time pursued a wiser excise policy in South Chanda than in other tribal areas, of allowing Marias free tree-tapping licences for domestic consumption in certain scheduled villages. The licences are valid for three years and the number of trees that may be tapped is restricted according to the population of the village and the number of trees available for tapping. This applies in much of the Maria country to the *caryotis urens* or sago-palm, the juice of which, as in Bastar, is much preferred to that of the ordinary toddy palm. This privilege had been accorded only to 239 villages of Sironcha tahsil and 58 of Garchiroli tahsil. The selection of villages had been somewhat eclectic; some large villages with only a small Maria or

[1] *Butea frondosa.*
[2] *The Aboriginal Problem*, p. 185.
[3] *Chanda District Gazetteer* (Allahabad, 1909), p. 100.